

# News Release



***Controller of the State of California - Kathleen Connell***

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## ***CONTROLLER IDENTIFIES PRISON REFORMS WITH POTENTIAL ANNUAL SAVINGS OF \$121 MILLION***

***Exposes High Inmate Education Costs***

***Suggests Redirection of Non-Violent Offenders***

**LOS ANGELES**, July 3 -- California's Department of Corrections (CDC) spends more money, per capita, to educate prisoners than California's K-12 public schools spend on children, according to a fiscal survey released today by State Controller Kathleen Connell. At a press conference at Los Angeles' "Twin Towers" county jail, Connell said the prison system reforms suggested by her Office could potentially save the State over \$121 million annually.

"Like other parents of young children, I think it is 'criminal' that the state prison system spends 30% more per capita to educate felons than public school children," said Connell. "What that 30% means is that, in the race for education dollars, prisoners have a \$1,300 'leg-up' on California school children." While acknowledging statutory requirements to provide education to inmates, Connell stressed that more cost-effective methods should be used, thereby allowing more dollars to flow into K-12 classrooms: "We should put our children first in education, so they can have hope for a future as productive citizens. Criminals who have shown their contempt for society should be much lower on the list of budget priorities."

Connell referenced her Office's observation that the CDC's Academic Education Program spends an average of \$5,234 per year to educate an inmate. Adjusting for comparability, the dollar figure for a child in a K-12 public school is just \$3,900. (Numbers are for fiscal year 1994-95, the most current year where data is available.)

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Furthermore, the CDC had no data to prove that its education programs reduced prisoner recidivism, the stated legislative intent of the prison education program.

The Controller's fiscal survey includes six observations that identify several areas for substantial cost savings:

\* ***Prisoner education cost, per capita, is \$1,300 -- 30% -- higher than that spent on education for California's K-12 public school children*** -- The Controller's report found that CDC spends an average of \$5,234 to educate an inmate per year. When state dollars for K-12 schools are adjusted for comparability, per student spending is just \$3,900. Additionally, the CDC was unable to provide any data that proves its education program has achieved the stated Legislative intent of reducing prisoner recidivism.

\* ***Less costly alternatives to incarcerating non-violent offenders could save \$87 million in ongoing operating costs*** -- Citing an average annual cost of \$21,000 per prisoner for state-level incarceration, the report suggest alternative punishment for non-violent offenders. Non-violent offenders include those convicted of such crimes as drug possession and petty theft, for example. Approximately \$87 million could be saved annually if just 20% of non-violent offenders (about 15,000 individuals) were redirected to less costly programs such as return-to-custody facilities and county jails. Inmate redirection could also reduce the need to build three to four new prisons, the cost of which is conservatively estimated at between \$498 million and \$664 million.

\* ***Massive overtime charges would be reduced by \$15.1 million through increased use of Permanent Intermittent Employees (PIEs)*** -- While CDC has improved overtime management, \$137 million in overtime charges were accrued in fiscal year 1995-96. An additional \$15.1 million could saved if, instead of using full-time staff, the CDC used qualified, part-time workers for 80% of its overtime hours. "We found one corrections officer who had amassed between 101 and 172 hours of overtime during each month for 11 of 12 months. That works out to 1,408 overtime hours for the year," said Connell. "That is absurdly expensive, and completely unnecessary when there is a proven, safe and effective alternative."

\* ***Recovering costs for monitoring inmate telephone calls could save \$10 million*** -- CDC currently has no system to accurately document the cost of monitoring inmate phone calls, nor does it collect competitive rates from vendors in connection with inmates' use of pay telephones. By developing a system to track telephone monitoring costs, and working with Department of General Services to match pay phone contract rates to other states, CDC can reap \$10 million in savings, and work toward recovering its monitoring costs.

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\* ***Improved negotiation of competitive rates for inmate medical care would save \$8 million annually*** -- The Controller's report noted that CDC could better leverage its \$451 million medical, dental and psychiatric services budget (fiscal year 1995-96) through tougher negotiation with its service vendors. Even if rates negotiated by CDC were double that of the State's much-larger Medi-Cal program, \$8 million in savings would be realized.

In commenting on the larger policy implications of her Office's report, Connell said: "Though inmate population projections have been adjusted downward in recent months, the price tag for prisons is still enormous. Let's face it -- every dollar that we can shave from the prison budget is a dollar we can invest in education," said Connell.

"Our report highlights millions of dollars in savings, but just as importantly, it focuses attention on major policy issues about which the Governor and Legislature must reach consensus if California is to have a rational, cost-effective approach to prisons in the future. These issues simply must be addressed, sooner rather than later."

Connell cited the following as pivotal to the debate about California's prisons:

\* Alternatives to Incarceration -- Noting overcrowding at state prisons, and the high cost of this method of incarceration, the Controller recommended that policymakers consider transferring non-violent offenders to local facilities (work camps, county jails) that can provide intermediate sanctions.

\* Effectiveness of Rehabilitation -- Connell pointed to the inadequacy of objectively verifiable data to settle the question of whether rehabilitation programs, such as literacy instruction and vocational education, actually have the intended effect of reducing recidivism.

"Taxpayers have a right to know whether their tax dollars are being put to good use, especially when there is a direct trade-off between dollars going to prisons and dollars we could otherwise invest in our children's classrooms," Connell said.

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*To receive a copy of the Controller's Office's fiscal survey report, contact Byron Tucker at 310-342-5678.*